

Log 1: Santiago's Legacy

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Summary: After a routine scouting mission, the Santiago was found floating near the Mytis Cluster - 3 bodie

Log 1: Santiago's Legacy

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NOTE: Hello! This is the revised version of Santiago's Legacy, debugged and dewormed and more fleshed out. Plus, if you want to read the continuation to this Log 2: The Children of Surelis, it can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Set/6627>. Thanks to Sian for her great help!

Plus, my e-mail is now lanfear@pd.jaring.my

LOG 1: SANTIAGO'S LEGACY By Lanna (lanfear@pd.jaring.my)

The world was a blaze of white pain and fear. As the light streamed uncontrollably around him, he tried to move his arm to shield his face, but his arm - if it was still there at all - did not cooperate, and the light continued to berate him mercilessly. He could only rely on his thin, blood encrusted eye lids to do the job - and they weren't very good at it. He didn't know how long he had stayed in that painful miasma, only that he moaned once in a while - a brief respite from his agony. But after a time, he noticed that the pain had disappeared. The light had disappeared. And he grew terrified, because he knew he was dead. He struggled against the darkness. He opened his eyes. _ His mind screamed - but he saw only darkness. _ Then the light flashed anew, and he closed his eyes in half relief and pain. He nearly thanked the powers that be for doing that to him...until he saw its face. It gazed at him, and he gazed back, puzzled and frightened by its alien beauty. Then it reached for him - and Lt. Thomas E. Paris knew no more. _

_ THE MYTIS CLUSTER, FOUR MONTHS LATER _

_ The bulkhead came apart with a solid twang. The young half klingon woman peered through the piece of hull she had ripped out at a web of circuitry. "Looks like the isolinear chips are shot to hell," said a voice behind her. Normally, she would have answered Ensign Kim with an enthusiastic growl, but Lieutenant B'Elanna Torres no longer had the strength nor the spirit to do so. She plunged herself straight into her investigation. Anything, just anything to find out what happened to- "Janeway to Lieutenant Torres." Torres stopped herself from ripping out the circuits and crushing them in time. "Yes Captain?" "I have asked Lieutenant Carey to take over for a while; you can rest now." You can rest now. Not you're 'relieved', Lieutenant. B'Elanna pursed her lips tight, managing to suppress an emerging growl. The Captain was trying to be nice. It wouldn't do to bare her fangs at her at such a time. "Captain, I'm not ready to go yet. Ensign Kim and I have retrieved the shuttle logs. We're close to -" "That's an order Lieutenant." The voice might have come from a tiny communicator, but it still carried the weight of command well. B'Elanna resisted the urge to slam her fist into the bulkhead - and through it. "Yes...Captain." She rose, side stepping the kneeling Ensign Kim as she made her way out. Her anger was boiling uncontrollably as always, and she didn't want Ensign Kim to be her next victim. As she made her way to the exit, she heard footsteps behind her. She tried her best to ignore them, but she knew Ensign Kim too well. She turned. "What is it Harry?" she managed. Ensign Kim looked anxious, if not pressed. "I'll tell you if Carey finds anything." She paused for a moment, then nodded. "I'd appreciate that. Thanks." She was about to turn when Harry stopped her. "B'Elanna. We'll find him. You know that, don't you?" B'Elanna felt guilty suddenly. She hadn't given Harry credit for staying up all those late nights with her, working for a solution, and before, at stellar cartography, searching for any signs of the shuttle -- the shuttle that they'd just found a week ago, complete with the 4 rotting corpses of crewmen Diaz, Loge, Amos and Lim. But no Paris. Somehow, that made it worse. Infinitely worse. With his death, there was only one possibility of his fate. With him missing, there were millions. "I'm sorry Harry," she whispered, watching his drooping eyes and slack mouth. She knew he was tired, perhaps even more tired than she was - "I forgot that you are searching as hard as I am." He looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" "I've been...ignoring you. Heck, I've been ignoring everyone. Just today the Captain told me that ...it has been four months, there might not be any hope, might as well just stick myself back in Engineering...." A wayward tear slid down her cheek, but she brushed it aside brusquely. "Hey." Harry said a little harshly. "If you're not giving up, I'm not giving up." B'Elanna smiled, then nodded. "You're an angel, Harry. You know that?" "Yeah." Harry smiled. "I know. And you're getting some sleep." "Or try to." She mumbled to herself as she walked away. _

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_ The Mytis cluster, as Neelix poetically put it, was the Delta Quadrant's Museum. Littered with dead civilisations, it had been a haven for archaeologists for centuries until the Xyrons (a strange race whose history B'Elanna hadn't bothered to listen to) chose the cluster as their personal battlefield for their never-ending wars. It had been left untouched after the wars, and Voyager might be the first intruder. Now, as B'Elanna gazed into its murky brightness from her bed, she wondered which star contained which dead civilisation -

and what the heck they had to do with Tom being missing. Grumbling, she pounded the pillow again and tried to be comfortable. Like always, it didn't work. Sighing, she got up and debated whether to get a cup of Raktijino from her burgeoning replicator rations. She couldn't rightly remember the last time she'd used the replicator - or had eaten. As always, when she stopped moving or even thinking of a current problem, the Memory returned. This time she didn't stop it.

"You are being a fool!" "A fool. A pig. What's the difference to you? Everything is so damned difficult with you!" "I'm just saying its not working out anymore!" she gazed hotly into his blue eyes. Tom grumbled angrily and settled into her couch, his arms crossed. "You give up too easily, B'Elanna." His voice was pensive. B'Elanna chewed her lip, but her Klingon side was reacting too strongly to the challenge in his words. Never say 'give up' to a Klingon. "We have been arguing for the past 3 months!" "We had great times too, for the past 3 months!" Tom yelled. "I'm just saying that each time we try to talk civilly, this happens. We can hardly speak without fighting with each other nowadays. I need space. I need...a separation." Tom eyed her, his blue eyes unreadable. "I don't want a separation." He said quietly. B'Elanna felt her control slipping away. All she could think about was Tom stopping her. Tom preventing her freedom. Tom controlling her life. "Fine," she hissed. "I'm not asking you. I'm demanding it. I want it." Without a word, she stepped out of her quarters. She heard the doors slide open the moment she turned into the corridor. What caught her by surprise was how quickly he had caught up. She was turned around by his grip before she could enter the turbolift. Tom looked deeply into her eyes. "B'Elanna...I. I'm sorry. But the fact is, I love you. We've been through rough times before...it's just. I can't lose you, B'Elanna!" B'Elanna bit her lip. "Then let me go." Her voice was cold even to her. His eyes clouded immediately. "I thought we have something special B'Elanna. It was difficult to be your friend. Damn it, it was impossible loving you!" He released his grip on her and turned away, his steps fading quickly into the corridor. She didn't know what had come over her. Their relationship had been through a rocky period - there were more arguments than their usual fun, and for a moment, she remembered how it had been before her father had split. It had been exactly the way she and Tom were now, and she had panicked. Separation was the best way, she had thought. Time to be apart from each other. Better to leave him before he left her. She was granted her wish -- he hadn't spoken to her for a several days after that. B'Elanna thought she could wait until he got over his hurt to patch things up and be friends again. She didn't think that time was what she didn't have.

Two days after their break up, Tom took the shuttle, Santiago, on a routine supplies mission to Rhikari. And disappeared. B'Elanna closed her eyes. And that was when she realised how stupid, how foolish, she had been. She had also realised that she loved Tom. Loved him so much that she couldn't bear to live without him. Tom was right. They'd been through rough times before. It was just her - she had panicked. She was a coward. Had been a coward all the time - just as she'd spent a year pushing Tom away before finally telling him the truth because she thought she was going to die. She had pushed him away again instead of solving their problems. She was a fool. An errant tear trickled down her cheek. Spurred to action by her loss of

control, B'Elanna angrily wiped the tear away and marched purposefully to the closed Messhall doors. Raktajino sounded nice.

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_ ***** "A very good morning to you, Lieutenant!" Neelix cried bubbly, as he plopped something pink in front of her. Before she could stop herself, her lip had curled up in distaste. "And this is?" "Kirellian Rat pudding. It's quite a delicacy." "No thanks. I think its too heavy for breakfast." "Or supper. It is after all, only 0340 hours." Neelix removed the plate without a complaint and gave her something else. Her eyebrows rose. "Peanut butter and jelly!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Oh yes, its quite a favourite breakfast dish. I remembered how Lieutenant Paris said it was comfort food...." His voice trailed away as he realized what he just said. He bent forward, watching her face. "I'm so sorry, B'Elanna. I didn't mean.." "It's alright, Neelix." She managed. "You made me smile for a moment there." And it was the truth. 'Comfort food'. She snorted to herself. How Tom loved to bring that said sandwich on every picnic on the holodeck - till she wanted to scream. "Kim to Torres." "Torres here." She replied quickly. "I think we found something, B'Elanna." "I'll be right there!" B'Elanna rushed to the cargo bay without a second glance at Neelix. She arrived just in time to see Lt. Joe Carey carry a torn bulkhead from the shuttlecraft. "The logs? It came through?" Harry nodded almost happily. "And we've got something else, too." Carey volunteered. "Something that could shed light on who attacked the Santiago." He showed her the bulkhead. "I don't believe it!" she said as she ran her hand over the engraved sign. "Why didn't I seen it before? How could I have missed it?" "Maybe because it was darkened with phaser burns? I managed to clean it. I'm as surprised as you are." Engraved on the bulkhead was a circular symbol with a strange letter. "Whoever who left that symbol was determined to leave a mark -- like some sort of victory sign." Carey said. "But Tom beat them to it." Harry said, his voice sober. He returned to his console and tapped a few keys. The logs, badly damaged, sputtered to life. B'Elanna watched, fascinated as the static cleared to an image of the shuttlecraft interior. She could see crewmen Lim on the floor, her eyes wide open with a head wound. Projectile weapons, she reminded herself. _

_ And then she saw Tom. _

_ Tom was slumped over in a corner in a sitting position. There was a bloody gash to his forehead, and his hand hung limply at his side. Broken. The aliens were ugly -- she'd give them credit for that. They roared with victory over their small kill, and one of them was engraving the symbol on the bulkhead. The universal translator faltered at translating their guttural language, but B'Elanna could make out the words "victory....success....honour gained." Then she saw it -- it was Tom! And he was opening his eyes. Slowly, he reached out from beneath him. A phaser. For a moment, static overcome the recording, but it cleared in time for her to see him draw the phaser and aim at the alien that was engraving the symbol. The shot rang true and pierced the alien from behind, slicing its neck. B'Elanna smiled in ferocious triumph as it slumped forward, its head decapitated. The other four aliens turned and looked at Tom. One effectively tore the phaser out of his victim's bloody hands. Tom only greeted their glares with a triumphant, defiant glare. They didn't seem particularly concerned their comrade was now missing a head, essentially dead. "Spirit this one has. Death not worthy." Said one. Its tones were flat and almost surprised. "We will give him a

deserving end." Said another. "Yes. We will give deserving end. We sell, yes?" "Sell. Sell. Much rubbarti gained. Much. Spirit this one has." Said the last alien as he approached Tom. He grabbed Tom. Tom didn't even struggle as it hauled him to his feet. And then the recording went dead. _

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_ "It ended quite appropriately, didn't it?" Harry muttered almost to himself. "Try as I might, I don't know what happened next. I suspect one of the aliens blew the console on purpose. It's a miracle we got anything out of this." He held the damaged chip as he looked at it. She took it from him and clutched it in her hand. "I think Neelix should see this." She whispered, her voice trembling with both rage and eagerness. _

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_ "The Mylkrie." Neelix shuddered. "Mylkrie?" Captain Janeway frowned as she stumbled over the pronunciation. They were still shuddering at the scene they had viewed from the shuttle logs. "They're warlike I gather?" Neelix snorted as if Janeway had just said a really, really big understatement. "Warlike? They live to fight. They fight to live. Both applies to them." He gestured towards the symbol on the table. B'Elanna had taken the initiative to get a holopicture of it. "I'm a little worried about that though." "What?" B'Elanna bent forward eagerly. "What does it mean?" "Well, it's a symbol for Mylkrie slave traders. Quite a respectable profession to their race. Mylkrie slave traders are very aggressive. And are known to attack ships without any provocation. They take prisoners only when they think they are worthy." "Care to explain that, Neelix?" Chakotay asked, tapping the table with his fingers impatiently. "Well, Mylkrie don't usually take prisoners until they think a victim (that's what they call their...er, victims by the way) has successfully stood up to them. Which is never, or hardly -- that's what makes the slave trade respectable to them. A job of a slave trader is to...well, find worthy prisoners." "And they sell the prisoners?" "Why...yes." He cleared his throat. "From what I have seen from the shuttle logs, Tom has been deemed worthy. He would've been--" He cast a sympathetic glance towards B'Elanna, "--sold by now." B'Elanna clutched her armrests, looking down. At least I know where he is. At least...we have a lead. She leaned forward, intending to ask Neelix just how to get to the lead when Janeway beat her to it. "Where's the nearest outpost for these...Mylkrie?" "That'll be the Hynek Port. Just 7 light years from here." "Then let's get to it." Janeway smiled, nodding to Chakotay. As the senior officers left the conference room, B'Elanna looked at the stars of dead Mytis civilisations and thanked them.....and hoped they gave up their secrets soon. _

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_ Captain Kathryn Janeway looked at the information on her PADD and at the hologram of what Neelix called the Hynek Port. To her, it looked like an oversized asteroid with antennas. Neelix said that the Hyneks were one of the very few races in the Delta Quadrant that had a trading agreement with the Mylkrie. The Mylkrie slave traders had made the Hynek Port an unofficial base of operations. Janeway sighed. Could the answer be there? Or were they wasting their

time...again? Kathryn remembered how she'd almost given up hope of ever finding Lt. Tom Paris until Harry accidentally found warp trails at a distant area of space. She remembered how the Santiago disappeared. They were supposed to rendezvous with Voyager 24 hours after reaching Rhikari on their supplies mission, but had failed to reappear. "Activate the long range scan," she had commanded, not really worried then. The Santiago could have easily been delayed. The crew was capable and professional and she trusted them to handle themselves. Although it was curious that they hadn't reported their delay... "Captain..." "Yes?" she turned to look at Ensign Kim. His frown was deeper than usual. He looked up, his face a shade paler. "I-I can't find them." "Explain," she replied, calming herself. From the corner of her eye, she noticed B'Elanna's head shoot up from her engineering station. "I've scanned the entire Rhikari space just to be sure, but they're not there. Scanners picked up something else...an alien warp signature..." He then looked up. "And some space debris." She went to his controls, ran the scans twice herself. Everything seemed to be in order. She even commanded the computer to go beyond 5 light years - a range well beyond Rhikari, but the Santiago was simply not there. The space debris...could simply just be space debris. Long range scanners didn't work that well due to the strong electromagnetic interference from Rhikari's three suns. "Helm, set a course for Rhikari." "Aye, captain," came the hesitant reply. She could feel the entire bridge's eyes on her. Especially B'Elanna. She just didn't have an answer for them then. She didn't have an answer for them now, either. _

_ "This could be it, Captain." Harry had said a week earlier. His voice was determined. B'Elanna was standing rigidly beside him, her hands fisted at her sides. If he succeeded in convincing the captain, and they followed the warp trail, Voyager would be light years off course from Home. "What makes you so sure...that it is the Santiago?" she had wondered. "The warp trail itself Captain." B'Elanna answered, surprisingly subdued. "It is uniquely Federation." "We have been analyzing and comparing warp trails of over 1000 space crafts -- courtesy of Neelix. We think this is definitely the Santiago." Ensign Kim continued, the hope on his face almost painful to watch. Kathryn bent to look at the astrometric chart that Harry had with him. "These readings indicate that the ...Santiago is 20 light years away from its original position." "Yes," B'Elanna said shortly, her temper definitely in check. "I have no idea how it could've reached so far, but the warp trail is definitely Federation. But what led us to the Santiago was not the Santiago's warp trail, but the same alien warp signature we found at Rhikari. The warp core must have leaked, leaving a blinding trail for us to follow." She had looked at the simulation of the warp trail on the PADD and the blinking light that was the Santiago. She knew she had to do it. "Get to it." Kathryn nodded to both of them. _

_ And they did find the Santiago, or what was left of it. She remembered stepping into the shuttlecraft in her environmental suit, watching the dead bodies of crewmen Lim, Diaz, Loge and Amos floating grotesquely around her. Tuvok had averted his eyes in quiet Vulcan respect, while Chakotay had an unreadable expression on his face. "The hull has been breached. And...judging from the phaser burns on the helm controls....I'd be pretty sure that it was directed at the gravity controls too." Chakotay noted. Tuvok fingered one of the bloodstains. "Blood. They were killed." She had said unnecessarily. For the first time since donning the suit, the cold of space entered her bones. To die here, gazing sightlessly into the space that was

reflected on the shuttlecraft's screen...she watched Diaz's blank eyes for a moment. His head was nearly decapitated. She didn't want to know what instrument had been used to kill him. "Get them down. And tell the doctor....to prepare them for an autopsy and burial. A full Federation burial." Chakotay nodded, he was touched -- a full Federation burial, for three former Maquis crew members. "I'll tell him. Tuvok?" Tuvok nodded as he helped Chakotay bring the bodies down. B'Elanna had almost been frantic with anxiety when they transported off Santiago. She was crushed when she was told that Paris was missing. "Some of the bloodstains belong to Lieutenant Paris." The Doctor said, his voice soft and concerned. "He had...lost a lot of blood. But it wasn't enough to kill him," He added quickly, hoping that would reduce the apparent death sentence he'd just pronounced. "B'Elanna." Janeway had whispered to her, "We'll find him. I promise you. Nobody does this to my crew and gets away with it." B'Elanna had looked at her with hopeless desperation then. Janeway could only grip her hand to reassure her. _

_ Kathryn said mentally, bringing herself back to the present. With a determined frown, Janeway made her way to the bridge. _

_ ***** 2.5 Light Years from Hynek Port _

_ B'Elanna looked down at her cooling Raktajino, her mind elsewhere. She didn't even notice Harry sitting beside her. "Hey." B'Elanna jerked, looking towards him. "Oh, Harry. You gave me a shock. Are we there yet?" She tried to cover her nervousness by smiling at him. "Almost." She nodded absently. "You know, I'm frightened to get there." She took a deep breath. "I'm afraid we won't find him there. Something inside me says he is NOT there." Harry gripped her hand, his expression grim. Then his expression changed and he grinned. "Seven says that the Mylkrie have been assimilated before. At least they're not invulnerable." B'Elanna laughed. "That's a funny thing to say." "Yeah, it is, isn't it?" Harry snickered. "I just don't know what to say at times like this. Definitely." He cleared his throat. "I miss the way it was, you know? When Tom would shoot pool at Sandrine's, when the bridge wasn't so quiet? He would crack a joke or two, usually at Chakotay's expense," Harry's eyes turned misty with memories. "I remembered the joke we played on Tuvok when he was promoted to Lieutenant Commander. Do you remember? 'Live Long and Prosper?'" Harry burst out laughing. B'Elanna grinned and chuckled, infected by his laughter. "And I remembered Tuvok being rather 'displeased' by it." Harry sighed. "He's left us with a void, B'Elanna. I miss him more than I can say. Even Tuvok misses him, I swear. I catch him looking at the helm with a faraway gaze all the time. Though he won't admit it." "Well, yeah," she took a sip and almost immediately made a face. "Uggh, the replicator isn't as fixed as I thought it was. I'm getting sloppy." After playing with the mug in silence, she continued. "We had a fight before he left," she said quietly. Harry nodded. He'd been aware of their problems months before the fateful Rhikari mission. "Tom told me...before he went." "I was so stupid, Harry," she said, frowning fiercely. "What came over me?" she shook her head. "I love him. I just couldn't bear him leaving me. So I left him first," She closed her eyes. "It was all Klingon pride, Harry. Just like how my mother...I just never knew that he would taken away from me so soon. I thought I could wait for him to cool down and we could be friends again and live happily ever after," she explained bitterly. After a moment, she shook her head again, draining her Raktajino in one gulp like a punishment. She made a face. "If this was liquor, I would've been dead drunk." Harry

laughed shortly. "We'll find him, B'Elanna." She smiled bravely. "I know. I'm not ready to lose him yet." Suddenly, the ship rocked. "What the?" Harry exclaimed. "We're being attacked!" B'Elanna cried - just as a huge, black winged space craft passed the mess hall windows. _

_ "Report!" Janeway's voice rang out as Harry entered the bridge. "Mylkrie vessels!" Chakotay exclaimed in surprise. This particular Mylkrie vessel was the size of Voyager. Neelix had helpfully given them the schematics of the alien ships. "In case they ever attack. You can never know; being so close to Mylkrie space," he had said. "It didn't take them long." Janeway mused sardonically, remembering his prophetic words. "Ensign Rolles," she gestured to the man at helm. "Take evasive maneuvers beta 7" "Aye, Captain." The Ensign cast a quick look at her before he proceeded. "Harry-" Harry came alive in an instant, fingering the keys, feeling its familiar hum. "-hail the Mylkrie. Let's see whether we can get them to listen." "Hailing." Harry replied automatically. He was surprised at the almost immediate response. "Captain. The Mylkrie-" "Human," boomed the guttural voice. The whole bridge fixated on the alien on the view screen. Janeway gasped. She could see Chakotay looking at the alien slowly from the corner of his eye. The Mylkrie was wearing a Starfleet uniform. A command red Starfleet uniform. Obviously Paris'...since none of the other Santiago crew members were missing theirs. "What did you do to my crewman?" She nearly snarled. The sight of the Mylkrie, with its yellow eyes and fanged mouth wearing what could be Paris' death shroud- The Mylkrie gestured to his uniform. "Much honour gained from this human. We deal with him appropriately." "What did you do to him?!" Janeway turned around quickly to see B'Elanna step off the turbolift in a half lunge. "Lieutenant!" she barked. Any sign of disunity or over-reaction could spark off the Mylkrie. "Nothing do." The Mylkrie replied, the computer generated translation coming off almost sly. "He ran. Very worthy prisoner. Great rubbati to be won." "What do you mean, he ran?" Janeway whispered. "He escaped. Worthy!" he said almost ecstatically. "We hunt! We sell him when we find him." "Over my dead body." Janeway hissed. "I don't believe this tale. You will tell us where he went, or rather, to whom you sold him!" "Human - worthy victims." And the transmission went dark. "Captain!" Harry cried. "They're turning around - coming straight at us; they're firing their wea-" The torpedo came sooner than expected. When it hit, Janeway could see nothing but white for a moment - then she found herself sprawled on the floor. "Report!" she cried immediately when the light faded away. "Hull breach on deck 7, 8 and 19!" Harry choked out. "B'Elanna! I want you to get back to Engineering-now!" she barked, annoyed that Engineering was unattended at such a crucial time. B'Elanna, visibly chastened, nearly scampered off the bridge to the turbolift. Helm! The helm was un-manned. She spotted Ensign Rolles at the side, his arm at an awkward angle. Thankfully, he was unconscious. She hoped he was. "Captain!" Chakotay called. "They're coming back." She watched, horrified, as the huge black winged ship returned. With a shudder, Voyager protested as the ship seamlessly cut through the shields, coming only meters close. "Ensign Kim-" she began. "They're using some sort of anti-magnetic shielding array! It's in cohesion with our shields!" he paused before continuing, this time more horrified than before. "Captain! The ship is changing shape! Something is extending from the ship." Harry reported. He looked horrified. "It looks like-" A claw. Janeway stared, fascinated at the sight of the ship reverting to a huge talon. Relentless, it came towards Voyager. The ship shuddered as one of the claws pierced the hull. We'll never survive this. She thought. But damned if I

don't die fighting! _

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_ "Lieutenant! I'm glad you're here!" Carey choked on smoke from burnt-out consoles. "It's Seven! She's doing something-" Immediately, B'Elanna hurried to the blonde former Borg. Seven was at the deflector array controls, her fingers quick and sure as she did whatever she wanted to do. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!" she barked. Seven merely looked serenely at her. "Configuring Voyager's shields to withstand the Mylkrie attack." B'Elanna paused. She has little trust for the former Borg, but she had proven herself over and over again the past few months she'd been aboard. "Alright. Let's hear it." B'Elanna heard it all right - focusing her thoughts as Seven walked her through the steps. Amazed at how such simple calibrations could possibly disable the Mylkrie ship, a ship that virtually cut through Voyager's shields like cheese, B'Elanna snorted in happiness. "Careful. We are not to damage the ship. Tom might still be on it." Seven gave her a puzzled look. "I do not understand. What is the life of one - to the life of 200?" "Look," B'Elanna snapped, losing patience. The ship rocked again - this time, she heard a visible crunch. She didn't want to know what caused it. "I do not have time to have a philosophical discussion on Borg vs. Human qualities right now. Now, Do you have a way to disable the ship without destroying it?" "Yes." Seven replied evenly. Without another word, she went back to her controls. A minute later, with the crunching sound becoming louder, B'Elanna hailed the bridge. "Captain. I think Seven has discovered a way to disable the Mylkrie ship. We believe that the deflector shields could be modulated to throw the magnetic field off - something like pouring water over a hot wire." "Do it! We don't have time-" the transmission was cut suddenly. "Looks like we're on our own. Seven, activate the deflector shields." Seven nodded. The hum that accompanied the activation of the deflector shields was accompanied by Voyager's shudders. B'Elanna clutched at her controls for dear life as Voyager shook violently, throwing some of the crewmembers onto the floor. Seven, however, was miraculously holding her position. "The Mylkrie vessel is losing shield cohesion. Damage to main engines." She announced flatly. _

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_ On the bridge, Janeway looked up in amazement at the Mylkrie vessel. Several portions of the ship was flaring up, blowing apart right before their eyes. "Harry?" "Captain. whatever B'Elanna did - it worked. The deflector is sending out shock waves big enough to damage the ship." With a roar, a large portion of the ship blew away. The chunk hurtled violently into space, neatly missing Voyager. Janeway crawled from her position on the floor to stare at the Mylkrie vessel. Its lights, which once blazed in triumph, were now dark. "Heavy damage to its warp core, Captain." "Try hailing the Mylkrie." Chakotay commanded. "No response, Commander." Harry replied, sounding particularly triumphant. "Janeway to B'Elanna." "Yes captain?" "Good work." "It was Seven. The Mylkrie had been assimilated before....after all." Janeway found herself smiling. Annika...or rather, Seven, had proven more useful as the days went by. "Understood. Janeway out. Chakotay?" The tattooed first officer glanced at her, his face slightly bruised. "Are you in the mood for an away mission?" _

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— Tuvok, Chakotay, B'Elanna and Janeway materialized on what appeared to be the bridge of the Mylkrie vessel. Cautiously, Tuvok moved his phaser around the room. —

— "I detect one life form," Chakotay said, watching the readings of his tricorder. "He's badly injured. The others, five of them, are dead." They moved north, in accordance with the signal. The bridge was strangely monolithic, with a ceiling that towered over 20 feet, it would had a majestic feel to it - if not for the grisly trophies that covered most of the walls. Skulls, skins and other souvenirs decorated the bulkheads. "Captain." Tuvok called. He gestured to an artifact on the wall. It was a portion of Santiago's hull. It contained the Federation insignia. Janeway ran her hand over the insignia, wondering how the Caretaker's actions four years ago could have led them to this. They walked past several dead Mylkrie, Janeway, for the first time, got a close look at them. In the heat of battle, she could only see the Federation uniform on the Mylkrie - here, she could see their features without any distractions. They had heavy-ridged brows; beady black eyes, no irises or pupils were visible. With a skin that was almost green, they could pass for reptilian, though Neelix had sworn that they were mammals 'who cared for their young better than Rajustian bird people' whatever they were. The fangs that decorated half the face were not so appealing, however. They curved like tusks to their chins. Despite her trained tolerance for the physical appearances of aliens, Janeway had to agree with B'Elanna - 'not very pretty' indeed. "Captain." Chakotay called. Janeway managed to snap out of it and walked towards the Starfleet uniformed Mylkrie. It lay on the floor before the view screen. Sternly, she studied the alien. According to the tricorder, it had suffered severe internal injuries, most of its blood vessels had ruptured. Janeway didn't know what Seven had concocted, but she definitely wanted an explanation soon. "It doesn't have much time." "Voyager, four to transport to sickbay." She commanded without thinking twice. —

— When the transporter tingle subsided she walked towards the bed holding the Mylkrie. The Doctor was already there, frowning over the his patient. "What is his prognosis, Doctor?" "Not good. Almost every blood vessel has burst. I don't think there's anything I can do. The damage is just too severe." He frowned, quite displeased that his huge range of medical expertise could not help. "Captain, it's awake." Tuvok warned, walking protectively towards her. Janeway watched the Mylkrie as it turned its beady eyes to look at her. Its mouth curved to what Janeway could only term as a leer. "Where is my crewman?" she demanded, knowing he would die soon. "Where is Tom Paris?" "Ran." The Mylkrie gurgled. "You are indeed, worthy, Human. It is a pity I cannot watch you die." Janeway swallowed a lump of revulsion. Tuvok moved closer, frowning in Vulcan displeasure at the statement. "But there will be others..." it continued, its voice ending in an alien chuckle. "Where is he?!" B'Elanna demanded out of nowhere. Janeway had almost forgotten that she was there. She had been so quiet during the short jaunt aboard the Mylkrie vessel that she'd forgotten her presence. She raised her hand to stop her from lunging towards the alien. "Very well," the Mylkrie replied slowly. "Since you are going to die anyway, I will tell you-- Vega Surelis." "Vega Surelis? That's 20 light years away from here!" 20 light years; approximately 5 days at warp factor 9. More time wasted. Less time

for Paris to survive. She cursed silently. "What did you do to him?" she demanded. The Mylkrie could only laugh. "Captain..." B'Elanna began uncertainly, her eyes slanting into worried slits. "His wrist, there's a timing device-" She saw the symbols on the strange disc-like device, alien as they were, display a downward count. "Tuvok?" "He does not have any explosive devices on him." Tuvok answered, scanning the dying creature. However, he didn't sound particularly satisfied. Chakotay's eyes widened in realisation. "The ship!" Chakotay cried. The Mylkrie roared with laughter. _

_ The Mylkrie ship lay silent; three of its claw-like appendages still clutched Voyager in a vise-like grip. On board, a dead Mylkrie lay slumped over a control panel. The control panel had flared to life only moments ago. In the guttural language of the Mylkrie, it announced: "Self-destruct sequence has been activated. 2.5 kiskna till destruction." _

_ "2.4 kiskna." _

_ "2.3-" _

_ On board Voyager, Janeway rushed to the bridge, breathless as she approached the Helm controls. Harry was there, replacing Rolles. "Helm! Phaser those appendages off Voyager's hull now! We're not going to be here when it explodes!" Ensign Kim went into action immediately, targeting the appendages - three of them - as the Chakotay went to Harry's controls to calibrate the weapons. _

_ "1.9 kiskna till destruction." Announced the Mylkrie computer. _

_ The first appendage was phasered off. The Mylkrie vessel careened dangerously close to the warp nacelles. "We have 40 more seconds!" Chakotay yelled. "0.8..." _

_ Janeway watched in desperation as the second appendage came off, but the third was only half way through. _

_ "0.3 kiskna..." _

_ "Now! Helm, Engage!" Ensign Kim needed no further prompting. _

_ "0-" _

_ The Mylkrie vessel exploded in a miasma of brilliant fire. Janeway could barely enjoy her triumph as she was tossed to the deck. _

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_ 2 DAYS FROM VEGA SURELIS _

_ Voyager limped weakly to their destination. Dogged relentlessly by Mylkrie war ships, it barely survived the last encounter as 4 Mylkrie vessels had swarmed around it. Thanks to Seven of Nine however, the deflector shields' effectiveness was increased 300%, effectively disabling, if not destroying, the vessels. But the numerous battles was wearing the ship thin. B'Elanna sat in the mess hall with Chakotay at her side, studying the stars that littered Vega Surelis. "This sector was once renowned for its beautiful planets. Each planet was a replica of your...Risa?" B'Elanna acknowledged the Talaxian with a small nod. She didn't take her eyes off the PADD she had in

front of her. "Only it didn't have Mylkrie warships waiting to kill you." Chakotay frowned. B'Elanna had been quiet since Hynek, too quiet. If Chakotay didn't know better, he would think she had given up. "What happened here?" he said, hoping to distract her from her black thoughts. "Well," Neelix took that as an invitation to join them. He sat beside B'Elanna. "I did tell you once that the Xyrons waged battle here?" Chakotay nodded. "Well, in their war, they'd destroyed the civilisations that were here. It was a tragedy of monumental proportions. In fact, I remembered reading about a few hundred civilisations in this sector. There were supposed to be twenty to thirty planets in Vega Surelis. I'm shocked to find only three. But then again, the Xyrons were good at destroying things - even planets." Neelix announced. "I was good at History-" Neelix chuckled proudly. "In fact, back on Talaxia-" "Neelix." Chakotay prompted. "Oh, sorry!" he chuckled. "Well, once, the Xyron Empire covered 20 light years - now they're extinct. They spared no one, not even themselves. Talaxia was once under Xyron rule two millennia ago. Well, for a brief moment before they got caught up with their wars." Neelix sniffed. "Do you know anything more about Vega Surelis...other than the beauty of its planets?" Chakotay smiled, hoping it would lighten the mood. "Well, it was the core of the sector! Trade, spiritualism, art...well, I've been reading your Earth history, and the best way I could compare Vega Surelis is to compare it with your ancient Rome? Or Greece." "Hmm. The Romans had descended from civilised glory to homeless hardship." Chakotay noted, feeling immediately the sadness of lost knowledge. "Well, the only difference with the Romans is that they survived. The civilisations in Vega Surelis - did not." Neelix smiled and took off to the kitchen after spying a waiting crewmember. "Well that was a happy tale." B'Elanna snorted. Chakotay chuckled. "Sorry for that. I wanted to distract you." "Oh? From what?" a slight smile curled her lips. "From Tom." He answered softly. B'Elanna smiled slightly. "I can't help it. We're so close to him. But I'm thinking more about surviving the journey to that planet than wondering whether he'll still be there." It was fortunate that the Vega Surelis system had only three M-class planets. Finding a system littered with hundreds of M -class planets would not have hastened the search. But Chakotay could feel B'Elanna's frustration. He wasn't exactly close to the pilot - heck, they'd been almost hostile their first two years in the Delta Quadrant. However, the last 2 years had shaped their relationship from hostile - to grudging respect. "But I want to stop mooning about Tom, Chakotay." B'Elanna continued. "I realise that I've been...I've not been as efficient as I was. I'm ready to-" "What? Give up?" B'Elanna stiffened. Chakotay hoped he wasn't too harsh, but B'Elanna needed to snap out of her self-pity. It wasn't her. "The Captain understands your predicament, and more often than not, you're too hard on yourself. You're doing fine. That's my crew evaluation of you, B'Elanna." B'Elanna smiled. She'd often forgotten how she'd regarded Chakotay as her mentor - she was surprised at the warm glow she felt at his praise. "Well-" The ship rocked. Chakotay nearly fell from his seat. Their eyes met. They knew what that meant. _

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_ This time, 10 Mylkrie vessels hunted them. They came from behind a moon, like matjullah vipers. Voyager rushed on overworked warp engines dodging the small vipers, but 3 had latched onto its hull. "Damn!" B'Elanna snapped as another console blew. "Seven! What are you not doing with the deflector shields?" she stepped over a fallen crewman to get to Seven. "The deflector shields are too badly

damaged." Seven of nine announced, a slight anxious tone to her voice. "I cannot do anything. The Mylkrie have learnt well." "No! We've come too far to be destroyed! Damn them!" _

_ * * * "Damn them!" Janeway cried when Harry was flung from his console. He lay on the floor of the bridge like a broken doll, his head bleeding from a head wound. Immediately, she took over, manipulating the controls to dodge the Mylkrie. But they came relentlessly. She didn't know what was worse - she'd battled macroviruses, gone through Borg space and even fought a species that could destroy the Borg - but watching the Mylkrie warships chewing at her ship's hull... "Kathryn!" Chakotay yelled, in his panic forgetting to address her properly. "Get out of there! It's about to blow!" "No! Give me a few seconds!" She could do it. Even then, her mathematical mind was steadfastly calculating the degree in which she should stimulate the shields to throw off the attached vessels. This might work! A sharp sound vibrated around the ship. For a moment, she looked up- And saw Chakotay lunging for her. _

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_ The Doctor glanced helplessly as the lights flickered off and on. He took his eyes off Ensign Wildman's unconscious form. Multiple contusions, broken leg, his diagnosis component analyzed. Beside the fallen ensign, her daughter was bawling while Ensign Mark was tried to calm her. Sickbay was awash with casualties. He found himself wishing for Kes again. What he could do with her careful dependency- It didn't help that he'd lost his assistant, Tom Paris. "Lieutenant Carey! What are you doing up?!" he cried, noticing the lieutenant limping off to the exit. "Going back to engineering." He snapped, clutching his freshly bone- regenerated leg. "Over my-" the Doctor began when he realised he didn't have a body to step over to begin with. "Get back-" With a start, he realised something was wrong. "Oh no." he cried despondently. Lieutenant Carey stared in horror as the Doctor disappeared. The portable holo-emmitter fell to the ground with a small thud. _

_ * * * "Umph!" Janeway fell a meter off Harry's console just as it blew off. "No! I could've made it!" she cried to Chakotay. "No, Kathryn! We have to evacuate the crew!" he shouted above the din of the red alert klaxon. In despair, Janeway realised that he was right. Without hesitation, she activated her combadge. "This is Janeway. All crewmembers evacuate to-" A sharp, keening noise exploded over the audio channels. Kathryn instinctively covered her ears while Chakotay winced, glancing reflexively to the view screen. What he saw there took his breath away. Janeway followed his gaze. She gasped. "What the hell?!" The ten Mylkrie vessels seem to freeze. Then, slowly, the 6 attached warships disengaged - making Voyager shudder for a moment - to face the new intruder. If Tom Paris was here, he would've said that this vessel was one giant of a beauty. The light was blinding, so Janeway could only squint to look at it. It was three times the size of Voyager. It had readings unlike anything Voyager had come across. Energy readings went off the charts and scanners, damaged as they were, showed an engine unlike anything she'd ever seen. "Seven, do you know who they are?" "No." Seven announced shortly. "Its ships schematics do not match any ships the Borg had encountered." The Mylkrie ships had only paused a moment before they launched themselves at the alien ship. Obviously, they thought the alien vessel was a worthier 'victim'. The alien vessel did not react. Kathryn had a wild hope that this ship could buy them time perhaps

even save them - but the hope sank as she watched, helplessly as the ten ships attached themselves effortlessly to its hull. There was a bright light - and her last thought was that she'd brought another ship to destruction. _

_ _____c1998 Lanna _

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file.